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ABSTRACT

This theme issue focuses on equity in children's literature, public funding for private schools, women in educational fields, female dropouts, and the relationship between school violence and family and community violence. "Violence in Our Schools" (Bradley Scott) explores reasons for school violence (media violence, isolation from family, racial and ethnic discrimination) and offers four suggestions for violence prevention and 15 suggestions to address racial hostility. "Hijas del Quinto Sol: Redefining Feminine Roles through Children's Literature" (Juanita C. Garcia) notes the importance of gender-sensitive children's literature in modeling sex role attitudes. A sidebar lists 20 titles for grades K-12. "Full Pockets, Empty Promises" (Albert Cortez) discusses issues of constitutionality, equitable student access, and accountability in using the voucher system to support private schools with public funds. "Women in Education Fields" (Yojani Fatima Hernandez) reports on women in various levels of education in Texas. "Reflections on Equity" (Norma V. Cantu) discusses discrimination and federal laws related to educational opportunities for females, students with disabilities, and minorities, as well as barriers to participation in vocational rehabilitation programs, gifted and talented programs, and accelerated courses. "Why Do Girls Drop Out?" (Anita Tijerina Revilla) discusses sexist views and stereotypes persisting in the classroom that lead to girls dropping out. A sidebar lists risk factors for girls, which girls drop out, school structure and dropouts, and academic and economic consequences of female dropouts. "Changing Faces, Changing Places: Challenges as We Enter a New Century" notes the resistance of schools to change due to lack of accountability and reiterates IDRA's commitment to work for needed changes. (SAS)

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INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Celebrating 25 Years
1973-1998

IDRA Focus:
Equity

IDRA Newsletter

ISSN 1069-5672 Volume XXV, No. 5 May 1998

ED 419 659

Violence in Our Schools

Bradley Scott, M.A.

Inside this Issue:

- *Gender sensitive children's literature*
- *Use of public funds for private schools*
- *Women in education fields*
- *Why girls drop out*

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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The nation has been dismayed by the recent rash of violence on school campuses. Media coverage has made each incident seem close to home. We are confused about what is actually happening, why it is happening – particularly as it is exhibited by our children and youth – and what we can do about it.

Three years ago in the *IDRA Newsletter*, I described the fourth generation of desegregation and civil rights. Among other things, it concerns the need to "create school and community collaborations on social issues affecting school operations and outcomes including issues such as violence, drugs, changes in families, employment, poverty and empowerment" (1995). My concern has not lessened since then. In many respects, it has increased.

While there are reports that violent crimes among youth have been decreasing since 1995, there are other reports that violent crimes motivated by race are not only increasing, but are becoming more broadly distributed. Let me explain.

Violence Decreases While Hate Crimes Increase

The National Center for Health Statistics reported that gun deaths in 1995 of children had decreased by 10 percent (5,820 to 5,277) from the previous year. It also reported a lower number of youth homicide incidents overall in 1995 than in 1994 (Martinez, 1998).

Similarly, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reported that in 1996, violent crimes such as rape, murder, aggravated assault and robbery fell 12 percent during the previous two years. Juvenile homicide arrests fell 31 percent since 1993 (Martinez, 1998). The only area with an increase in crime was crime against older teenagers (16 to 19 years of age).

Evidently, the public campaigns to address crime and violence, the push to re-create safe communities and schools, the reaffirmed support for prevention strategies, and the increased funding for tougher community and policing activities are making a difference. We should be encouraged that when we put our minds and will to it, we can make a difference.

Yet as we breath a sigh of relief, we find that during the same period noted above, the Intelligence Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center reported that the number of active hate groups motivated by race, religion and ethnicity has risen by 20 percent to a total of 474. These groups continue to grow in number and membership. They are found in almost every state in the nation. There are at least 163 web sites representing 81 hate groups that spew their venomous hate demagoguery through the Internet (Intelligence Project, 1997).

The Intelligence Project also reports hundreds of acts of violence motivated by hate that happen in communities and schools throughout the 50 states. We are improving in some aspects of violent crimes, while in other areas, it seems as if we have hardly scratched the surface.

Reasons for the Trends

Why is this happening after so many years of working to make things better? There are many suggestions to explain the trends.

Violence in Our Schools continued on page 10

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—Compiled by Dr. Luann Chris Green at IDRA

HIJAS DEL QUINTO SOL:
REDEFINING FEMININE ROLES THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Juanita C. García, M.A.

The Aztec legend of the *quinto mundo*, or fifth world, tells us we must balance all sides of our nature, including the masculine and feminine forces inside us all.

Gender sensitive children's literature offers exciting, positive role models for boys and girls today. Thus, many educators are expanding their knowledge base regarding gender issues and their influence on literacy education.

The Aztecs believed there were four historical ages called worlds or suns. Each was ruled and then destroyed by a god. Three new life forms resulted. The fifth world is ruled by all four gods, so it is more stable but also prone to doom unless we bring all of the forces into balance and banish evil from our hearts. According to legends of the Aztec elders, this present epoch, or the fifth world, is known as the sun of movement that brings constant change. We must learn to balance the four forces of nature – air, earth, fire and water – in their destructive and constructive forms to reach our full potential as spiritual and physical beings (Green and García, 1995).

In her book, *Massacre of the Dreamer*, Ana Castillo writes that around 5,000 years ago humanity began moving toward the deliberate omission of the feminine principle. We all have masculine and feminine within us, but the masculine has been allowed to reign. In the 1970s, the United States began to realize the effects of sex role stereotyping in U.S. society, including in education (Cassidy, et al., 1994).

However in general, reading educators have not addressed the issue of sex role stereotyping and gender bias. Out of 665 reading education articles published between 1988 and 1993, only five dealt with gender issues and their relationship to literacy education (Cassidy, et al., 1994). Gender roles in our society have usually been defined by stereotypical views of female and male roles learned in childhood. Changing roles have received little attention in children's literature until the last decade, but today many exciting books portray interesting, strong characters who are both female and male.

Children are aware of role differences at a young age. They know there are differences in gender, language, color and physical ability. They have learned this by observing the differences and by taking in the verbal and non-verbal messages about the differences. These negative stereotypes short-change children's development. Children will be unprepared to interact effectively with many people in the world. Gender sensitive children's literature seeks to nurture the development of every child's fullest potential by addressing issues of equity and diversity in a pleasant and instructive way.

OUT OF 665 READING EDUCATION ARTICLES PUBLISHED BETWEEN 1988 AND 1993, ONLY FIVE DEALT WITH GENDER ISSUES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO LITERACY EDUCATION.

One of my favorite gender sensitive books for young children is *The Piggy Book (El libro de los cerdos)* by Anthony Browne. In a family with two sons, the mother does all of the housework and works outside the home, too. After years of silent servitude, she leaves her husband and children to fend for themselves. They transform into pigs and the house becomes a pigsty. When she decides to come back, they all share with the housework and she enjoys fixing the car.

Before reading to the children, I find out what preconceived ideas and opinions students have about gender roles by reading a series of carefully worded statements that focus attention on the concepts covered in the book. Using statements that are controversial or address common preconceptions creates conceptual conflict and challenges commonly held beliefs.

This is a motivational technique to get students involved in the book. The three statements I use for *The Piggy Book* are:

1. It is mom's job to do all the housework;
2. Girls cook better than boys; and
3. Only boys can fix cars.

Students have to agree or disagree with the statements and then justify their position. The curiosity aroused about the topic can only be resolved by reading the book to corroborate students' prereading stance on the issue.

After reading, we revisit the statements and respond to them again, this time using additional information gleaned from the book. Many of the children change their positions after listening to the story, but some maintain their stereotypical roles of boys and girls. Therefore it is important to integrate other gender sensitive children's literature into the curriculum. Teachers can use these wonderful books to help their students overcome preconceived ideas.

Through the imagination, literature shapes life and thought. Literature can educate the heart as well as the mind and foster compassion and humanism and banish evil from children's hearts. Gender sensitive children's literature can identify the characteristics of positive role models, and literature extension activities can enrich students' expectations for themselves.

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COMING UP!

In June-July, the *IDRA Newsletter* focuses on gifted and talented students.

Full Pockets, Empty Promises

Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

In a news conference in late April, a San Antonio-based non-profit organization announced its new 10-year $50 million initiative to provide vouchers for students to attend private schools. The Children's Educational Opportunity (CEO) Foundation initiative exclusively targets students in the historic Edgewood Independent School District (ISD) – the playing field of the state's school finance reform battles. The CEO Foundation plan promises that the 14,000 students in the district will have the opportunity to apply for and possibly attend other public schools or private schools in the San Antonio area.

Surprised educators, families, politicians and reporters are delving into the details of the plan (more on that below) as San Antonio is thrust into the spotlight of the national voucher debate. Only two school systems in the country are experimenting with publicly funded voucher programs, and a handful of cities have privately funded programs. Because of the size of the CEO Foundation's program (reportedly the largest project ever to push school vouchers) and because of its strategic targeting of Edgewood ISD students (the first time a single school district has been targeted), San Antonio will be watched closely by the nation. What people see will have significant implications on state and federal proposals to use public money for private schooling.

Framing the Debate

Voucher programs have become part of the discussion of how public schools can be improved. Proponents of public funding for private schooling have attempted to frame certain policy questions, such as whether parents should have the option to receive state subsidies for their decision to enroll their children in private schools. Proponents also suggest that public schools can be improved by the introduction of competition for the public monies used to finance public schools.

While it is understandable that proponents of vouchers would want to frame questions in ways that benefit their agendas, it is IDRA's view that the use of public monies for private schooling raises more fundamental questions about the future of public education, religion and accountability in this country. The fundamental questions are (1) whether or not it is legal to use public monies to subsidize private and religious education and (2) whether or not use of public monies offers all students opportunities to equally access high quality education in their communities.

Unconstitutional Measures

Many lawyers who have studied the legal aspects of this issue have long contended that such actions violate the constitutional provision of separation of church and state. Regardless of how the issue is positioned (tax credits, school choice, vouchers for families or students, parental choice, etc.), the bottom-line question remains the same: *Is it constitutionally permissible for public tax money to be used to fund private or religious education?*

Public accountability for the expenditure of public monies is assured through direct election of school board members in local communities or through appointment of board members by publicly elected officials. Private and religious schools do not have public elections for their governing boards. Such boards are not held accountable by the community for the use of tax dollars. The lack of such publicly elected boards and accountability systems in private schools raises serious constitutional questions about the legality of subsidizing such operations from public tax sources. In fact, the publicly funded voucher programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland have been successfully challenged in the courts as a violation of the separation of church and state and are currently under appeal.

Inequitable Measures

If the formidable legal questions could somehow be addressed, other fundamental questions still surround voucher plans. These questions can be clustered into three key areas: equitable student access, school improvement and equal accountability.

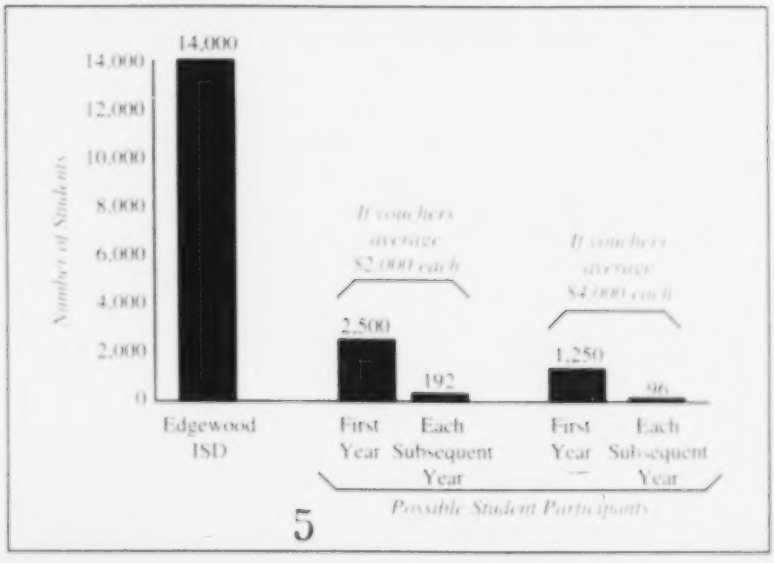
Concerns about Equitable Student Access

Proponents of publicly funded vouchers propose that diverting public tax monies from public schools will somehow give students more options. They claim to finally give students "choices" – as if students currently have no choice other than to attend their local public school.

However, reviews of state public school operations across the country clearly show that many students already have choices. For example, communities that are striving to better serve students who have specialized interests are operating publicly funded magnet schools and local academies

Full Pockets *... continued on page 5*

Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation New Voucher Program in Edgewood ISD



Full Pockets – *continued from page 4*

that specialize in the arts, technology and similar high interest areas. Also, many states now allow public charter schools that have more freedom to try new ideas. In addition to offering public and independent charter schools, several states (including Texas) give families the opportunity to transfer their children out of low performing schools into nearby higher performing public schools and, in some states, into other districts.

Thus, many children already have several options available to them. If these options are not being utilized sufficiently, it may be necessary to strengthen the communication and outreach efforts to ensure that all students have equal access to such alternatives.

So the issue is not really about providing options. *It is about including private and religious schools among those who receive public tax revenue.* This in turn raises the question of whether or not all students have equal access to the alternatives.

People familiar with existing private school operations know that the vast majority of private schools reserve the prerogative to enroll only those students the school chooses to accept. Many private schools use screening tests to determine whether or not pupils meet school-determined criteria for acceptance. Others may choose to weigh entrance criteria so that brothers and sisters of students already enrolled are given preference. As private enterprises, private schools can reject students. Thus, school staff – rather than students or parents – have the ultimate "choice" of who gets to enroll in private schools.

Unless the mechanism used involves a lottery approach (where all participating private schools agree to accept all applying students), the chances for school discrimination increase dramatically. While still subject to federal prohibitions against discrimination based on race or religion, private schools can exclude students on the basis of grades, test scores or "special needs."

Concerns about Improved Schools

Voucher proponents often contend that introducing competition for public school funds will somehow improve all local public schools. Before rushing to open the public tax coffers, the community at-large should take a step back and ask for evidence that supports such contentions.

Private schools have competed for local community students for more than 100 years. So the notion of public vs. private competition is certainly not new. Yet there is a striking absence of data to substantiate claims that local public schools benefit from the diversion of public money for private operations.

Emerging research in communities that are experimenting with voucher plans suggests that local public schools are not helped but, in many cases, are damaged. For example, a study of the impact of one voucher plan documents the loss of more academically successful and non-minority populations from central city schools. Other studies have determined that performance levels of local schools did not improve and in most cases actually declined as a result of lost resources. Most studies related to the contention that local schools benefit from the loss of pupils and money to publicly financed private schooling either reveal that the opposite is true or cannot draw a conclusion due to small samples, etc.

As voucher advocates continue to disregard the lack of supporting data and insist that their proposals are beneficial to local public schools, it is reasonable for parents and other concerned citizens to want to see proof. Student advocates should set aside "trust me" assurances and references to business-based market competition theories. We should insist that voucher advocates show evidence that the threat or reality of losing some students somehow improves local public school performance. Without evidence, public officials should be hard-pressed to approve transfers of public monies to untested alternatives.

Concerns about Diminished Access and Lowered Accountability

Public schools that receive state and federal funding are subject to strict civil rights requirements, extensive public review and high levels of public accountability. Proponents of using public monies for private schooling historically have requested *full access* to public funds accompanied by *partial or full exclusion* from federal and state civil rights access requirements and state accountability requirements. This raises the question of whether or not the entities that receive public funds should have similar accountabilities.

- Should all schools be equal, or can some be accepted as more or less equal than others?
- If a non-public school receives public funds should it be subject to open record requirements?

Full Pockets – *continued on page 6*

IDRA Perspectives on Public Funding for Private Schools

- ✓ All students should have **equitable access to excellent community-based public schools.**
- ✓ All publicly funded schools should be required to **accept and serve all students.**
- ✓ **Improving public schools** is best achieved by providing public school with adequate fiscal resources rather than by diverting limited resources.
- ✓ **Ensuring accountability** for producing high levels of student achievement is best achieved in a context where local school boards are accountable to the local community electorate.
- ✓ **Public support for public education** is best achieved when **local parents are vested in (have a stake in)** the local public school system.
- ✓ **In areas other than civil rights, government regulation of private schools should be commensurate** with the level of public funding received.
- ✓ **Parents should have the prerogative** of enrolling their children in any private school of their choosing provided they finance those choices from **non-public funding sources.**
- ✓ Creation and maintenance of high quality publicly financed public schools is critical to the **creation and maintenance of the educated electorate** needed to sustain our democratic society.

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- Should the school be required (like all public schools) to serve *all* students within its jurisdictional area, including children with "special needs"?
- Should schools that receive public money be required to comply with federal laws?
- Will all schools that receive state funding be subjected to identical state accountability and reporting requirements, or will private schools be exempted?

IDRA contends that anyone who receives public funds should be subject to the same high levels of public scrutiny and public accountability. In the case of private schools, however, who can be held accountable by the public, particularly if the public has no role in selecting the school leadership or the governing board?

Key Questions

The concerns raised above pose serious legal and practical challenges to the concept of providing public monies to subsidize private school operations. It will not matter whether the state provides 100 percent or 1 percent of individual student funding for private schooling. The provision of public monies for private schools itself raises a tremendous number of public policy questions and concerns for students that simply will not go away regardless of how sophisticated the rhetoric becomes.

THE PROVISION OF PUBLIC MONIES FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS ITSELF RAISES A TREMENDOUS NUMBER OF PUBLIC POLICY QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS FOR STUDENTS THAT SIMPLY WILL NOT GO AWAY REGARDLESS OF HOW SOPHISTICATED THE RHETORIC BECOMES.

Implementing or expanding public funding for private schooling before these major issues are resolved is poor public policy.

Regarding any voucher proposal (publicly or privately funded), the following questions should be raised and answered.

- How many students will be subsidized annually through the program? What criteria will be used to make the selections?
- What provisions will be made to assure that students (rather than schools) have real options? For example, what guarantees will parents and students have that they will not be denied admission to any school they apply to because of characteristics that require adaptation of instruction?
- What guarantees do students have that they will not be required to pass an achievement or other academic skills admission or screening test as a condition of their enrollment or re-enrollment?
- What support will be provided for transportation for those students whose parents do not have cars or the money to cover daily bus or subway fares?
- What guarantees will be provided to assure future applicants that preferences will not be given to family members or previous voucher recipients?

Concerns in Edgewood ISD

Reaction in San Antonio to the CEO Foundation announcement has been mixed. Some members of the Edgewood community were understandably excited about the prospects of getting "scholarships" to support their child's enrollment in private schools. Some expressed reservations about the proposal and perceived hidden agendas. Some came to the defense of the school district's improvements in student achievement during the last several years. Others raised critical questions regarding the impact that the foundation's plan would have on the quality of schooling available to the majority of students who would remain in the district's schools.

There are questions circulating about the number of students the program can actually accommodate. On average, Edgewood ISD students who apply for enrollment at some of the city's more upscale private schools would require a $4,000 subsidy per year. The CEO program could only support 1,250 of Edgewood ISD's 14,000 students in a single year. Assuming that these 1,250 pupils are evenly distributed across grades (96 pupils at each grade level) and that the only students who do not renew their scholarships are graduating seniors, only 96 new slots would be open each year.

Even if the average scholarship is $2,000 (half the average actual tuition charged), no more than 2,500 students could participate, and only 192 new slots would be open in each year after the first year.

Other questions relate to (a) the criteria that would be used to decide which students receive money and which are denied, (b) who would make those decisions (the foundation or the schools where the pupils are applying), and (c) where parental choice fits in such a scenario.

Proponents of the program have publicly claimed that almost all Edgewood students would be eligible to apply for the scholarships. What has not been stated is

Full Pockets - continued on page 15

"School choice is the right name for a wrongheaded re-form of public education. It is the private schools with the choice ... they decide whether to accept a child or not."

– James M. Dunn, executive director, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, (March 1996).

"So far there is little evidence to support the view that choice enhances school effectiveness measured by students' academic achievement... There are, however, a number of consequences of using public funds [for private schooling] that are virtually certain. The more [such measures are] maximized, the more likely it is that we will also:

- *Sort students by race, income and religion and increase social conflict and economic disparity.*
- *Reduce financial support for public education and for programs serving children with special needs.*
- *Increase the costs of good private schools.*
- *Lower standards of academic performance overall and simultaneously decrease the demand for school reform at the grassroots and among elites."*

– Willis D. Hawley, dean of the college of education, University of Maryland, in "The Predictable Consequences of School Choice," *Education Week* (April 10, 1996).

WOMEN IN EDUCATION FIELDS

Yojani Fatima Hernández

Much has been written about the glass ceiling – that invisible, seemingly impenetrable barrier that blocks women from progressing to the highest levels of management. In the 1990s, it seems that women are making great strides in the struggle for equal rights. But even today, the gap between men and women in administrative positions is disturbing, particularly in the area of education.

In the state of Texas, men significantly outnumber women in all of the prominent professions in society, including architecture, engineering, law and most areas of management and administration. Yet, the male dominance in administration in the field of education is specifically unusual because women make up 77.3 percent of all teachers, the group from which school administrators are drawn (Texas Education Agency, 1998). The lack of proportional representation of women combines with an even greater lack of representation by people of color. This makes the picture for minority women even more distressing.

Since its passage in 1972, Title IX has had a profound impact on changing attitudes, assumptions, behavior and understanding about how sexual stereotypes can limit educational opportunities. We now know that gender is a poor predictor of one's proficiency, capability or intelligence. There have been changes for women in the areas of leadership and management in public schools. However, what still holds true about public education is that, while women dominate the field, they hold few leadership positions.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) recently reported facts about women in education fields in Texas in the 1997-98 school year, including the following.

- Women represent three-fourths (75.6 percent) of the 493,440 public education employees.
- Women of color represent one-fourth (25.5 percent) of public education employees.
- Women of color represent 1.4 percent of superintendents; 9.1 percent of assistant superintendents; 6 percent of principals; and 9 percent of assistant principals.
- More than half (56.5 percent) of the female teachers in public schools worked in early childhood and elementary schools. TEA reports that, of the 111,284 teachers that worked in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and elementary schools, 90 percent were women in the 1997-98 school year.
- Almost two-thirds (62.1 percent) of male public education employees are working in secondary schools. They make up 39.4 percent of all secondary teachers.
- The majority of the administrators in the Texas public school system are male. Of the 16,536 administrators (public school administrators include instructional officers, principals, assistant superintendents and superintendents), 50.1 percent are male. Of the 993 superintendents in Texas, 90.3 percent are male.

Yet in the past eight years, there has been some progress for women in the area of administrative and leadership positions in Texas public schools (see box).

The number of women in public education in Texas has stayed relatively the same while the number of administrators has shown an optimistic increase. In the 1990-91 school year, women comprised 78.5 percent of the teachers in public education but only 36 percent of its administrative leadership positions. Seven years later, women still dominate the teaching profession (77.3 percent) while holding almost half (49.9 percent) of the administrative positions (TEA, 1998).

In the area of principalships – an important leadership position in Texas public schools – there has been significant change. In the 1990-91 school year, 36.9 percent of the principals were women. In the 1997-98 school year, the percentage of women principals increased to 50.4 percent.

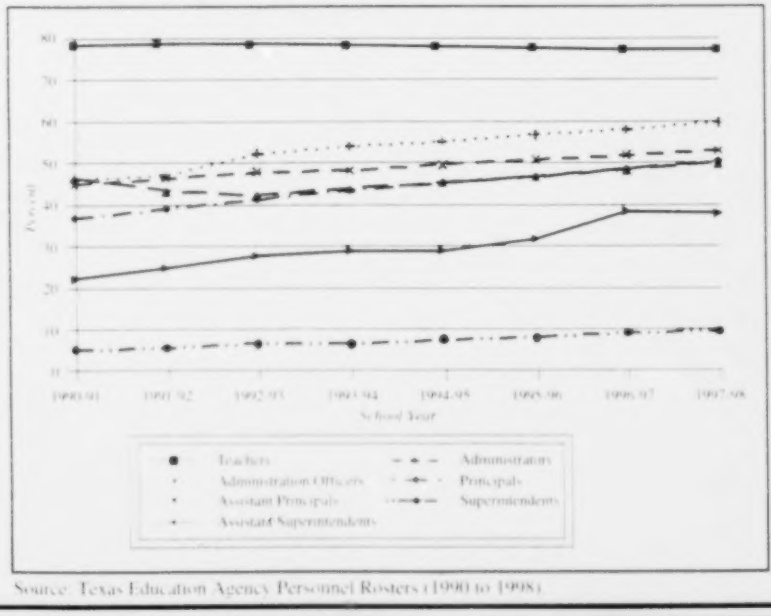
Little change has taken place in superintendent positions. In the 1985-86 school year, 2 percent of the superintendents were female (Cantu, 1996). In the 1997-98 school year, 9.7 percent of the superintendents were women (TEA, 1998).

It simply does not seem possible that 77.3 percent of teachers are excluded from the superintendency based on a gender bias. It would seem that is the only conclusion when only 22.7 percent of teachers are considered qualified to be administrators (TEA, 1998).

In comparing 1990 to 1998 statistics to the earlier figures about males and females in public education, most observations continue to be true (see box). Women still make up most of the teachers and support staff personnel. Men still dominate the high administrative positions in public education. It has taken 13 years to increase the percentage of women in administrative

Women in Education – continued on page 15

NUMBER OF WOMEN IN TEXAS PUBLIC EDUCATION BY YEAR AND JOB TITLE, 1990 TO 1998



Source: Texas Education Agency Personnel Rosters (1990 to 1998).

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Norma V. Cantu

REFLECTIONS ON EQUITY

Many students in U.S. schools are reporting to the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education that they have experienced discrimination because of their race, national origin, gender, language background or disability. OCR consists of 12 enforcement offices with a headquarters in Washington, D.C. It receives roughly 5,000 administrative complaints each year from students, staff and parents who allege illegal discrimination against students. We have no way to document unreported matters involving discrimination, of course, but one indicator that schools and colleges are faced with problems of alleged discrimination and are working to avoid discrimination may be the level of requests OCR receives for technical assistance – 500 calls a week.

The good news is that, without exploring the question as to whether discrimination has occurred, our office has been able to reach agreements to positive solutions in many of the cases filed with OCR. The resolutions, which satisfy the school and the student, were reached promptly, often in the same semester that the complaints were filed.

The bad news is that far too many of the complaints filed with OCR are due to, in my words, "old-fashioned and traditional" discrimination. These complaints signal that equal access to education is still being denied despite the many federal laws have been in place for a quarter of a century. What do I mean by "old-fashioned" problems? One example is the disabled high school senior who was informed by her school that her graduation diploma would be mailed to her home because the graduation ceremony would be held in an auditorium that was not wheelchair accessible. This exclusion from the benefits of education should not exist 25 years after the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination against students on the basis of disability.

Why do civil rights problems persist? One suggestion is that local staff and leadership turnover contributes to the need for constant reminders about what the civil rights laws do and do not require. That is a plausible explanation. It has also been suggested that federal and state civil rights agencies have not enforced the laws adequately. If the expectation is that the agencies will require quotas, that is not a realistic request. We do not enforce quotas. The expectation is that we follow the people-intensive task of tackling small concerns before they grow into large problems, but this type of civil rights enforcement has not been consistent because appropriations have been uncertain. A third suggestion that I personally reject is that parents and the board members they elect to represent them just do not care about providing equity in education.

Assuming that the reason old-fashioned discrimination against students continues is insufficient training of new decision makers about practices and policies that serve students equitably, let us look at what is required under federal statutes.

Ending Discrimination

In recent years, Congress has passed five broad federal statutes that protect students from discrimination. These laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability, age, sex, race and national origin. A few people criticize the federal civil rights laws as weak because the laws require *equal opportunities* for students, not *equal results*. These critics point out that vulnerable children need guarantees of success, not merely a chance to succeed. I do not agree. All children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can learn when given a chance.

It is undisputed that the federal laws do work to open doors. For example, 25 years ago, before Title IX was passed, girls were often excluded from educational programs and benefits solely because schools tolerated gender barriers to educational opportunities. Today, because of that law, women have greater access to high school math and science courses, high school and college sports, college degrees, and faculty positions. Men have also gained access to traditionally women-dominated fields.

Similarly, students with disabilities have overcome substantial barriers to educational opportunities as a result of the civil rights laws. In 1975, more than 1 million children with disabilities were excluded from public school. Today, access to degrees for students with disabilities is similar to that of students without disabilities.

Removing discriminatory barriers is not easy. In the past four years, in partnership with state leadership, OCR has produced substantial educational opportunities. To list a few examples, OCR, in state partnerships, has:

- removed barriers statewide to participation by minorities and limited English-speaking adults in state-run vocational rehabilitation programs in California,
- removed barriers statewide to participation by minorities in gifted and talented programs in Georgia, and
- removed barriers statewide to participation by minorities in high-track, accelerated courses in Louisiana and Mississippi.

These changes in expanding access to education open opportunities to thousands of students nationally.

Creating Equity

Federal laws and their enforcement cannot by themselves overcome all of the educational variables. Some students may see the open door, yet not step in. No federal agency mandates regular daily attendance, or ensures that homework is completed, or obligates a student

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to take certain challenging elective courses. All the federal civil rights laws can do is remove discriminatory barriers. It is then up to students, teachers and parents to contribute their share of the educational partnership in order to move ahead.

The New Civil Rights Challenge

In the next century, the challenge will be to continue the battle against discrimination and, at the same time, pursue strategies to promote educational excellence throughout the nation. As Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley has often said, ensuring access to a quality education should be considered a civil right of the 1990s. Our country's students deserve no less.

Norma V. Cantu is the assistant secretary for civil rights at the U.S. Department of Education.

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DESEGREGATION ASSISTANCE MODULES AVAILABLE

Sex Stereotyping and Bias: Their Origin and Effects

by Reece Love, Ph.D., and Alicia Salinas Sosa, Ph.D.

This training module is designed for trainers to assist classroom teachers in identifying sources and effects of sex stereotyping and bias in the classroom setting and in society as a whole. Use this tool to help participants become aware of the socio-economic and psychological effects of sex-role stereotyping and of ways in which gender bias and stereotyping are manifested in the classroom setting. Participants can also review the origin and effects of gender bias and stereotyping in the media. This 57-page module comes with session outlines, a pre/post test, handout and transparency masters, and visuals (ISBN 1-878550-57-8; 1995 Revised).

It's a Matter of Race: Race Relations in the Desegregated Setting

by Bradley Scott, M.A.

This training module is designed for trainers to familiarize classroom teachers with key issues regarding interpersonal race relationships in the desegregated setting and to review suggestions on how to handle these relationships effectively. Participants will establish an appropriate context for examining race relations in the desegregated setting. Use this module to familiarize participants with important related race relation terms and to analyze examples of racism or other forms of discrimination. Participants can also apply a process for dispelling rumors and myths that affect good race relations. This 52-page module comes with session outlines, a pre/post test, and handout and transparency masters (ISBN 1-878550-17-9; 1996 Second Edition).

$8.50 each. To order, send a check or purchase order to:
IDRA, 5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350, San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190; fax 210/684-5389.
Other modules for training and technical assistance are available, contact IDRA to request a list or see IDRA's web site at <www.idra.org>.

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Violence in Our Schools *- continued from page 1*

Diane Levin from the National Association for the Education of Young Children provides one suggestion. There is a media culture of violence that affects children. It can be seen in the following seven ways, as reported by the American Medical Association.

- Media violence causes an increase in mean-spirited, aggressive behavior.
- Media violence causes increased levels of fearlessness, mistrust and self-protective behavior toward others.
- Media violence contributes to desensitization and callousness toward the suffering of others.
- Media violence provides violent heroes whom children seek to emulate.
- Media violence provides a justification for resorting to violence when children think they are right.
- Media violence creates an appetite for viewing more extreme violence.
- Media violence fosters a culture in which disrespectful behavior is valorized as a way of treating others (Levin, 1998).

In the absence of other intervenors, this media violence shapes and produces children who accept violence not as an *exceptional* way to handle life, but as the *typical* way to handle life.

Exhaustive reviews of the evidence, accumulated for more than 40 years in more than 3,000 studies, have lead researchers to conclude that the media significantly contributes to the aggressive behavior and attitudes of many children, adolescents and adults (Donnerstein, Slaby and Eron, 1993).

Another suggestion is offered by a report by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. David Johnson and Roger Johnson suggest that changing patterns of family and community life are partially responsible for this tendency toward violence:

> Today, children are more isolated from their parents, extended family members and other adults than ever before... Divorce, abuse, poverty, drugs and other forces that interfere with healthy parenting disrupt many families. With isolation, separation and abuse comes a lack of socialization... What is perhaps most alarming is that violence is becoming so commonplace in many communities and schools that it is considered the norm rather than the exception (1995).

In short, violent schools are produced and reproduced in violent, alienated, estranged communities and homes.

Harriet Romo attributes a large portion of the problem of conflicts between racial and ethnic groups in schools to some persistent problems that we still must address. These include:

- The ways that members of certain racial or ethnic groups are included or excluded within U.S. society and schools.
- The formal ways (e.g., ability grouping, tracking, honors versus regular classes, remedial and vocational classes) and informal ways (e.g., self-separation and segregation, selecting and "claiming" school territory) that students are resegregated in schools and classrooms.
- The ways racial and ethnic group identity are used to include and exclude people from groups and to make some feel inferior or superior based upon the status assigned to the inclusion or exclusion.
- The persistent matters of prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination that continue to surface around race, color, ethnicity and economic status as well as gender (1997).

The IDRA Desegregation Assistance Center – South Central Collaborative for Equity (DAC–SCCE) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education to provide services to schools in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. As in other regions, numerous racial incidents and outbreaks have occurred. We have surveyed teachers and students about their perceptions of race relations, interaction and conflict in their schools. They told us that much of the problem is the result of people having negative attitudes and prejudices against each other, people not being able to trust each other across racial and ethnic lines, people only wanting to help their "own kind" and showing favoritism, and those in charge only giving lip service to fair and equitable treatment, respect and acceptance.

These respondents are recognizing a lack of good faith among people across racial and ethnic lines that translates into negative treatment and interaction. Even more disturbing is the general perception, in these instances, that those in control are so disingenuous toward those who are not in control that people must do whatever is necessary to protect themselves, their friends, their turf and their possessions from those "controlling others." We have found this to be true whether those in control are "majority" or "minority."

The DAC–SCCE has been working to create safe and drug-free schools for almost nine years. The comprehensive regional assistance centers authorized by the *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994* and the desegregation assistance centers have worked together to assist districts to create safe and drug-free schools since 1995.

There are three sets of issues that must be addressed to create safe schools. One set of issues relates to *violence in general*. Another set involves *violence that is motivated by race and ethnicity*. Finally, there is a set of issues where *violence is motivated by gender*. Because of some unique concerns that arise in this last area, it will be addressed in an upcoming article in the *IDRA Newsletter*, while the first two issues are addressed here.

Suggestions for Violence Prevention

Regarding violence prevention in general, Johnson and Johnson suggest that schools do the following.

1. Admit that conflicts are out of control.
2. Implement a conflict resolution program.
3. Implement a violence prevention program that has a variety of components:
   - Eliminate weapons brought to schools, through random searches if necessary.
   - Have a predetermined way to address violent behavior when it occurs.
   - Train faculty, staff and students to recognize and intervene in violent situations.
   - Target individuals who commit violent acts and use available resources to modify their behavior.
   - Teach students to recognize and change beliefs that result in violence and to manage anger.
   - Employ the help of others from the community to speak to students to encourage them to abstain from violence.
   - Create district-level and campus-level task forces on violence to develop a system for identifying the causes of violence.

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- Adopt a threat-management policy to ensure that students will receive protection if they believe they are in danger.
- Provide counselor-led debriefing and support sessions for students traumatized by violent incidents.
- Initiate a weapons and violence hotline to report weapons and violence that occurs on school grounds or at school-related activities.

4. Become a "conflict positive" organization by enhancing the quality of teaching, learning and school life, and by organizing students and teachers into teams that work in cooperative learning groups and collegial teaching groups. Implement prevention programs focused on negotiation, peer mediation, arbitration and conflict resolution (1995).

The comprehensive regional assistance centers, such as the STAR Center*, can assist school districts by providing technical assistance to address these general issues of conflict. The desegregation assistance centers can assist school districts in addressing violence motivated by race and ethnicity.

Addressing Racial Hostility

In addition to the concerns noted above regarding violence in general, there are some issues that must be addressed when dealing with violence that is motivated by race and ethnicity.

President Clinton noted on June 14, 1997, as he spoke about his initiative on race, "Building one America is our most important mission... money cannot buy it. Power cannot compel it. Technology cannot create it. It can only come from the human spirit." His advisory board on race explained:

> The initiative is an effort to move the country closer to a stronger, more just and unified America, one that offers opportunity and fairness for all Americans. It is a chance for every citizen in our country to be a part of a great national conversation about America's racial diversity and about the strength it brings our nation (1998).

The President has called on the nation to engage in dialogues on race. Patrisia Gonzalez and Roberto Rodriguez remind us that, today, these dialogues cannot and should not be just about African American and White relations. They must "speak to America's reality, particularly its cities where the dynamic is not between African Americans and Whites, but rather among Blacks, Latinos, Asians, American Indians, Arab Americans and Whites, who increasingly find themselves in the minority" (1997).

More than dialogues alone, however, let me suggest a 15-point program for schools and communities that are addressing racial hostility and violence.

1. Create a clear and specific **policy addressing a prohibition against violence** of all kinds that will not be tolerated on school campuses or at school-related activities.
2. Create and implement a specific **policy on violence predicated upon race and ethnicity**. Ensure that this policy is aligned with the Office for Civil Rights guidelines on racial harassment and hostility in schools. Provide training on racial hostility and harassment to staff, students and parents.
3. Establish **campus-level action plans** for addressing intergroup and race relations. Include a component that addresses the proper procedures for handling racial outbreaks (should they occur) so that they will not escalate.
4. Establish and consistently implement **disciplinary procedures** for handling staff, students or any agent of the school who act in a racially hostile or violent manner.
5. Ensure that administrators and staff continually publicly **communicate that racial hostility and violence will not be tolerated** on the campus, at any school functions or related activities.
6. Implement **training and development for staff, students and parents** on **mediation skills, conflict resolution and hostility intervention** where the impact of race and ethnic prejudice, attitudes and perceptions are the focus of discussion.
7. Implement training for staff, students and parents on **prejudice reduction, discrimination and race hate crimes**.
8. Structure discussions and activities into appropriate areas of the **curriculum** such as social studies, literature and government courses. These topics should include discussions on race, race relations, prejudice, discrimination, responsible citizenship and social justice.
9. Structure **culturally relevant classroom learning activities** so that interracial teams of students interact to reach common instructional and social goals, and expand their knowledge and acquaintance of each other.
10. Establish **local dialogues on race and ethnic relations** and facilitate these sessions with skilled, trained group leaders that possess group dynamic and group processing skills.
11. Ensure that there is a **procedure for dealing with outside agitators** that attempt to peddle race hate on the campus or at school-related functions.
12. Ensure that there is a **procedure for informing and including the police** (when and if the need should arise) to resolve conflicts and violence.
13. Establish active, visible, legitimate **opportunities for parents** to be involved in and responsible for addressing, monitoring and helping to resolve racial conflicts, hostility and violence.
14. Examine and re-organize **classroom and school structures** and other

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Upcoming Events

Bilingual Education in Texas: Unidos Para Un Futuro Brillante

Hosted by
Texas Association for Bilingual Education

October 21-24, 1998
San Antonio, Texas

For more information, call 1-800-TABE-930

Improving America's Schools 1998 Regional Conferences

Hosted by
U.S. Department of Education

Western Region: Portland, Oregon
October 19-21, 1998

Central Region: Denver, Colorado
November 18-20, 1998

Eastern Region: Nashville, Tennessee
December 15-17, 1998

For more information, call 1-800-203-5494 or visit www.ncbe.gwu.edu/oiasconferences.

Violence in Our Schools - continued from page 11

operations that separate and segregate students along racial lines, and in those instances where racially identifiable separations exist that are legitimately unavoidable, ensure that such separations are kept to a minimum in time and purpose.

15. Regularly conduct **environmental scanning** to determine the quality of race relations by surveying students, staff, parents and others as necessary to stay on top of intergroup relations and any potential problems that might lead to outbreaks of racial violence.

This 15-point program requires parental and community support, resources and commitment. Educators can conduct some of the activities on their own, but the impact will not be as effective as with the active participation of parents and other community members.

The violence in our schools is everybody's business. We cannot afford to allow it – however it is precipitated and motivated – to interfere with the goals that we have established for academic achievement and excellence. Our students deserve more than violent lives and violent schools. For that matter, our nation deserves more.

Resources

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** The STAR Center is the comprehensive regional assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve Texas. It is a collaboration of the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation. For information about STAR Center services call 1-888-FYI-STAR.*

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HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT IDRA ACTIVITIES

In March, IDRA worked with **5,362** teachers, administrators and parents through **35** training and technical assistance activities and **143** program sites in **12** states plus the United Kingdom. Topics included:

- Advocacy and Community Building
- Implementing ESL Standards into the Curriculum
- Thematic Units
- Sexual Harassment Prevention
- IDRA *Focusing on Language and Academic Instructional Renewal* project evaluation

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- Midland Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- Wagon Mound Public Schools, New Mexico
- Cyprus Fairbanks ISD, Texas
- Texas Education Service Center, Region XI (Ft. Worth)
- Houston ISD, Texas
- *Community Education Leadership Program*
- Laredo ISD, Texas

Activity Snapshot

A major urban school district in southeast Texas plagued by racial tension, hostility and violence requested assistance from the IDRA *Desegregation Assistance Center – South Central Collaborative for Equity*. The center quickly assessed the situation and context; interviewed and surveyed key forces in the district including administrators, teachers, parents and students; and articulated a clear and appropriate response to the problem. Part of that response included bringing together the different key stakeholders and helping them to realize the effects that their tension, hostility and violence were having on children. Through our collective work in dialogs, effective decision-making and problem-solving, they transformed the school environment.

Regularly, IDRA staff provides services to:

- public school teachers
- parents
- administrators
- other decision makers in public education

Services include:

- training and technical assistance
- evaluation
- serving as expert witnesses in policy settings and court cases
- publishing research and professional papers, books, videos and curricula

For information on IDRA services for your school district or other group, contact IDRA at 210/684-8180.

Why Do Girls Drop Out?

Anita Tijerina Revilla, M.A.

Whether or not they are excelling in school, girls are often not given appropriate attention in classrooms. In many instances, male and female teachers enact sexist views and enforce stereotypes in the classroom, ignoring the potential (positive and/or negative) of female students.

One teacher sadly admits that boys get all the attention. "It's all negative attention – detention, things like that – but it's *attention*, it signals who's more important" (Orenstein, 1994). Of course, teachers are not the sole bearers of the blame, the problem is much deeper. Sexism is ingrained in every facet of our lives.

Gender Bias in Schools

In *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*, Peggy Orenstein analyzes some of the issues that girls have to deal with in school that relate to gender and power. Her examination of poor and minority girls includes observations that many feminist and gender equity advocates ignore. She writes:

> The gap in standardized test scores between the affluent and the poor is far greater than any gender gap between low-income boys and girls. Low-income children, regardless of race, rarely score at the advanced levels in reading or math, while high-income students seldom fall below the basic skills level (Orenstein, 1994).

In classrooms with high numbers of ethnic minorities, boys and girls alike experience inequities such as low standards, poor resources and cultural insensitivity. These boys and girls are faced with markedly different situations than students from middle-class and high-income families. Gender equity is a low priority, and it is an almost non-existent worry at schools where teachers and administrators believe that the "real" problems are related to poverty.

While these issues are significant, verbal and physical abuse plagues classrooms. The obscenities that girls and boys subject themselves to are clearly illegal and are in violation of the Office for Civil Rights guidelines. Yet many educators turn away from those "less important" problems such as sexual harassment and sexist actions.

When Orenstein complained of the sexual harassment she witnessed in a particular urban school, she wrote:

> Those teachers respond[ed] that the children's home environment makes their school behavior inevitable. In other words, instead of the hackneyed pretext that "boys will be boys," the unspoken implication is that "Blacks will be Blacks," "Latinos will be Latinos," or, perhaps, "poor people will be poor people." That assumption serves the school well: it conveniently blinds teachers to the large number of boys and girls who do not harass... while absolving them of responsibility for educating the ones that do (Orenstein, 1994).

While educators, administrators and entire communities blame children for dropping out of school, research shows that students drop out because they feel disconnected from the school and because they lack support.

These types of assumptions encourage girls (and boys) to lose faith in the institution of education. If a girl believes that no one cares, then she too will stop caring about herself and her involvement in school. Thus, while educators, administrators and entire communities blame children for dropping out of school, research shows that students drop out because they feel disconnected from the school and because they lack support.

A 1989 Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) study, entitled *Female Dropouts: A New Perspective*, reported:

> When people think of students who are most likely to dropout, they think first of disruptive boys, and then of pregnant girls. This stereotype does not reflect reality. Girls and boys drop out of school at approximately the same rate. Further, although 40 percent of girls who drop out are pregnant or getting married, the majority of girls who drop out are not (WEEA, 1989).

Many members of society have become complacent with their attitudes toward the drop out phenomenon in the nation. Some educators believe that there is little that can be done to prevent dropouts, but one only has to talk to student dropouts to learn that the obstacles they encountered were deep and began long before marriage or pregnancy.

Students' Perspectives

In 1996, students in an adult education class conducted a survey of other adults. For this article, I analyzed a sample of 38 subjects (33 females and five males) who were interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, by Brenda Pimental and Mike Standeford. All of the subjects were identified as high school dropouts and were involved in a state-funded adult education program.

Out of 38 interviewees, only five reported pregnancy as the reason they left school, and 10 said they left school to get married. Other reasons included: working to support the family; being an immigrant or migrant worker; unfair treatment from teachers, administrators or parents; language barriers; peer pressure; and self-made decisions.

One woman reported that although her pregnancy was the reason she left school, the treatment she received as a pregnant student forced her to make that decision. In her own words she wrote:

> I dropped out of school when I was pregnant. The P.E. coach made me run when I was 2½ months [pregnant]. I told him that I was pregnant. He told me to run but not fast (Hispanic female).

This young woman did not want to endanger herself or her child's health. She was not offered prenatal care information about her pregnancy, instead she was told what to do, and there was no concern for her well-being.

Another woman indicated that sexism directly affected her future because her parents focused on educating the boys only. They said boys need to have an education because men support the family" (Hispanic female).

At least 15 of the subjects said that the majority of the teachers, counselors and administrators were not nice or good to them, and 11 did not feel that they had been given the same opportunities that other students were given. The study showed that

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Why Do Girls Drop Out? – *continued from page 13*

pregnancy and marriage as reasons for school noncompletion occur at a lower rate than typically perceived. Furthermore, students received little or no support from the school or community.

One of the major goals of the Intercultural Development Research Association has been to help decrease the number of student dropouts. IDRA has initiated several research projects that explore reasons students drop out and programs to implement dropout intervention strategies. IDRA research has found the following.

- Expectations and success in school are directly related.
- Organizational operations can be structured in order to facilitate the success of all students who are at risk of dropping out.
- Curricular and instructional approaches that are integrated, yet varied and flexible enough to engage each student, facilitate the success of children.
- Feelings of isolation contribute to dropping out of school. Schools can develop a sense of belonging.
- Students require a broad range of services to meet their socio-mental, health and nutritional needs.
- Schools can increase their holding power by responding to the economic needs of at-risk students who must work.
- Preschool experiences can contribute to the academic success of at-risk students (Robledo Montecel and Montemayor, 1990).

This research was specifically designed to study low-income and at-risk students, but each finding can be held true for all students, including at-risk girls. Essentially, girls and boys that are at risk of dropping out need to be valued by the school system, teachers, administrators and parents. The progress of each individual student is closely related to the amount of support he or she receives from the school community.

Janice Earle has 10 recommendations for taking a pro-active approach toward making true changes for girls a reality in schools.

- Instruction should include cooperative work and should be sensitive to female cognitive development.
- Girls with academic problems should be offered extra assistance (e.g., peer tutoring).
- Mentors and female role models in various occupations should be sought

Why Do Girls Drop Out? – *continued on page 15*

What Makes Girls at Risk?

Socialization	Girls are taught to be unassertive and to expect that a man will take financial care of them in the future.
Cognitive Differences	The teaching structure of most classrooms reflects a bias toward the way boys learn, placing girls at a disadvantage.
Teacher Interaction	Teachers' responses to students favor male academic development, confidence and independence.
Curricular Choices	Girls limit their potential by the courses they select. They also choose vocational training for traditionally female jobs with lower pay and prestige.

Which Girls Drop Out?

Background	Female dropout rates are more sensitive to variations in socio-economic status and to the number of their siblings than male dropout rates.
Characteristics	African American and Hispanic females are more likely to drop out of school due to socio-economic factors than White females.
Pregnancy, Parenting and Dropping Out	Teen pregnancy is increasingly viewed as an indication of low self-esteem, low basic skills and a general lack of life options. In this sense, the pregnancy itself is not the essential problem.

School Structure and Dropouts

School Structure and Girls	Many pregnant and parenting girls do not have adequate support systems outside of school; therefore, schools must provide more than the education "basics."
School Structure and At-risk Youth	As currently structured, schools do not work well for at-risk students.

Female Dropouts: A New Perspective

Academic Consequences	Evidence suggests that females – especially those who are minorities in urban areas – suffer more serious academic consequences when they drop out. After dropping out, they are less likely to return to complete their education.
Economic Consequences	Evidence suggests that females suffer more serious economic consequences when they drop out.

Source: Earle, J. and V. Roach. *Female Dropouts: A New Perspective* (Massachusetts: WEEA Publishing Center, 1989).

Why Do Girls Drop Out? *– continued from page 14*

out and shared with students.
- Extracurricular activities should enable girls to participate as actively as boys.
- Girls' self-esteem should be boosted with counseling and/or other activities.
- Counseling and educational activities should involve parents and encourage them to be more involved in their children's education more effectively.
- Partnerships must be formed with outside agencies and organizations to provide students with social services.
- School environments must be flexible enough to accommodate students' individual learning and service needs.
- Staff development should explore strategies for bias-free student-teacher interactions.
- Girls should be encouraged to pursue nontraditional careers and enroll in math, science and technology courses (Earle and Roach, 1989).

The recommendations made by the WEEA program and other education advocates are not new. Similarly, the problems that female dropouts face are not new. Yet while studies have proven that there are effective intervention programs, few school districts have adopted these schoolwide reforms. Until these practices are adopted, we can expect that the situation will worsen and that the number of female (and male) dropouts will increase. The only way to truly decrease the number of dropouts is to become pro-active leaders and follow the advice of the numerous studies that have proven the value of these recommendations.

Resources

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Full Pockets *– continued from page 5*

that students would have a one in 11 chance of actually receiving support (assuming students are selected by lottery). If any form of testing or grades becomes a criteria, only those students meeting the designated screening criteria would get the monies that have been promised. Those students who are ultimately chosen to receive vouchers must still be accepted by the school.

While seemingly impressive and charitable on its surface, the foundation's proposal will do little to help most students in Edgewood schools have access to a better education. It may help a few, but it will not help the great majority of students.

As higher achieving students (and parents) opt out of public education, and as district resources decline, the performance ratings of Edgewood ISD will probably decline as well.

However, more than anything else, the situation points to the need for all students to have access to high quality publicly funded public schools in their own communities. This is a public trust that is best addressed in a publicly controlled and publicly funded enterprise.

Quality Schools for All Children

Those who fought for decades to achieve equitable school funding did so to enable all students in all communities to have access to high quality educational programs. This was a departure from the old systems that provided high quality schools for some children, while relegating the majority of students to less than adequate schools or none at all. After many courts have ruled that equitable access to funding is legally required in publicly funded schools, it is noteworthy that some people would argue it is not possible or desirable to have this universal quality across all public schools.

Some skeptics observe that the cry for public funding for private schooling did not emerge until many states outlawed the operation of grossly unequal public schools. These skeptics propose that the voucher movement is little more than a ruse for giving more options to a few select students and communities, restoring the privilege and funding lost by the elite as a result of court-mandated reform.

Instead of abandoning some schools in order to attend others, why not concentrate on improving poor performing schools located in some communities. Are they not worth improving? Does the community not deserve excellent public schools?

Private support for private schools has been and should remain an alternative for proponents of religiously affiliated and non-sectarian private education. Providing scholarships to a few students in low performing schools, however, will contribute little to the improvement of educational opportunities for the overwhelming number of students who will not benefit from such programs.

Gerald Terrozi, assistant secretary of education, observes that in many instances proponents of voucher plans give answers to questions that were never asked by local communities and avoid critical questions that focus on the real issues at hand.

Can public schools provide both excellence and equity for all pupils? IDRA believes they can. While it has long been a critic of the quality of public schooling available to too many of our children, IDRA continues to believe in the need for, viability of, and potential of public education. Like our democracy, public education is neither easy to implement, nor easy to sustain. But compared to the elitist, exclusionary systems that have evolved in many other countries, it is – like our democracy – a far better option for children.

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Women in Education *– continued from page 7*

positions in public education from 29 percent (1984-85) to 49.9 percent (1997-98) (TEA, 1998). Although women in administrative positions are no longer considered an oddity, the numbers of women in these roles is far smaller than is acceptable.

Resources

Chase, S.E. and C. Bell. "How Search Consultants Talk about Female Superintendents," *The School Administrator* (February 1994).

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CHANGING FACES, CHANGING PLACES:

CHALLENGES AS WE ENTER A NEW CENTURY

The face of education in the United States has changed in the last 25 years, and the changes that began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s have accelerated. The places where education occurs have likewise changed. Some schools, insulated from changing demographics and isolated from the mainstream of the majority of the country, continue to be unaffected. But the majority of schools and teachers struggle to adapt to a new reality of different students, different parents and changing communities.

Statistics on school dropouts, retentions in grade and academic achievement levels indicate that in too many schools and communities, educators are not succeeding. The reasons for the lack of success vary and are often multi-dimensional. IDRA believes that one of the major reasons that more schools and more students are not succeeding is that, although the faces of those whom we educate have changed and will continue to change, those who serve them – the school "systems" – have not.

Schools continue to be staffed by teachers, administrators and support staff who were prepared in other eras, who are different in color and economic background than the communities that they serve. Despite claims of reform, most schools operate out of an educational paradigm that has remained basically unchanged for decades: a paradigm in which educational success for some and educational failure for many others is deemed acceptable.

This paradigm is based on a deficit view of children. It assumes that a particular type of child – whether defined by race, gender or language – is to blame for educational failure. Deficit models try to change the characteristics of the student and the family so that they will fit into the school program. Instead, schools should be changing their programs to fit their students.

Schools have been slow to change and have not been able to keep up with the evolving realities (new faces, new societal demands, fast technological advances) because schools are people, and real change is hard for real people. Like most institutions, schools tend to be tractive and resist change. Many people in schools know little about how change can be planned and managed, even when they want to change. In many cases, people in schools do not see for themselves that change is possible and can be good. Schools do not feel the urgency to change because schools are not held accountable for results.

Since its beginning 25 years ago, IDRA has promoted accountability and equity in public schools. IDRA has provided expert testimony in court cases that created contexts for change. IDRA worked with state legislatures to create policies that promote appropriate instruction in bilingual education programs and to advocate reforms to school finance systems. IDRA has conducted critical research on the status of education and promising practices. For more than two decades, IDRA has operated a desegregation assistance center and various other research and technical assistance centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education. IDRA works with tens of thousands of educators each year in creating educational solutions through participatory hands-on presentations, workshops and technical assistance that promote sustained growth and development.

Many people believe that schools must change but lack insight on what needs to change and how to change it. Based on its more than 25 years of educational reform advocacy, IDRA believes that schools can change, but not on their own.

In the 21st century, IDRA will continue to be a champion for education equity for all children as it works with people to achieve three targeted goals: for all children to stay in school through high school graduation, for all children who speak a language other than English to benefit from quality instructional programs that capitalize on students' language and culture, and for all children in every neighborhood to have access to excellent public schools.

Schools can change if they have a new vision created by people who believe that all children are valuable, that all people can contribute, and that public education can indeed change things, including futures.

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